

Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Mary Sevilla

INTERVIEWER: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments]

[00:01:26.17] INTERVIEWER: Let's start with you telling us your full name and your age.

[00:01:36.17] SR MARY SEVILLA: I'm Mary Rita Sevilla, and I'm eighty-one years old as of a couple of weeks ago.

[00:01:43.27] INTERVIEWER: Tell us about where you grew up and a little bit about your family.

[00:01:47.25] SR MARY SEVILLA: Okay. Well, I was born and bred in Los Angeles. And after I finished the sixth grade, and my younger siblings--whatever grades--and my younger brother--we moved to Manhattan Beach [California]. And house that my parents bought--my Dad called it a shack--[smiles]--and so they rented a house next door. And it was very--primitive in Manhattan Beach at the time. We were a mile back from the beach. There was only one other house on the block besides what we were occupying. And the best part about that was that we lived next door, and every weekend my uncles and cousins would come and help build on to the house that my parents bought. And so, of course the wives came and brought all the food, and we played with our cousins. It was a very happy time--we loved it. After--from there, my youngest siblings went to American Martyrs. It was a new school--it only went to the sixth grade, and I was in seventh. So for the seventh and eighth grade I rode the Greyhound bus to school every day, and had to race to get the five o'clock one after school, because we played ball after school. If I missed that the next one was two hours later, so-- [laughs]. Okay, then when it was time to go to high school, I really didn't want to go to St. Mary's Academy. I thought all the girls--you know how you think about that. But my parents persisted--my mother I should say persisted--and I went, and for a long time she wouldn't even ask me how I liked it, because she was afraid of what I'd say. But I loved it--it was wonderful. And so my whole story is that I had Sisters of St. Joseph from the time I was six years old all the way through my BA--so that was true at St. Mary's. And I liked the Sisters--thought they were great human beings--they were happy, and fair I thought, and you know I think they were great women. So I did admire them.

[00:03:43.13] INTERVIEWER: How many siblings do you have?

[00:03:46.11] SR MARY SEVILLA: There are five of us: my older brother, Tony, is two years older; and then after me is Maggie, three years; and then after her three more years is Joe--boy--male; and after that two years is Juanita. And we're all very athletic and involved in that kind of thing, and so part of Dad's fixing up the house was to put a basketball standard more or less in the back yard. [laughs].

[00:04:16.03] INTERVIEWER: Were you a very religious family?

[00:04:18.02] SR MARY SEVILLA: My Mom was--I think she should have been the nun. [laughs]. She was very religious yes, and I can remember us having to say the rosary, and for some reason I was in a hurry one night, and I'm saying to my brother across the way [whispers], "Hurry up! Hurry up!". And Mom said, "Mary!" That was the end of that. [laughs]. And then sometimes Mom took us to night devotions--my sister Maggie and I--and we thought the older women singing was pretty funny, so we giggled through it, so I think she stopped taking us after that. And Dad didn't go to church at all. His mother died when he was seven--in Mexico City--it was where he's from--and so they weren't really raised into Catholicism. But when my youngest sister made her first communion Dad went back to church. So he always saw that we got there, you know, and that kind of thing, but he didn't participate until that point.

[00:05:13.05] INTERVIEWER: When did you know you wanted to become a Sister?

[00:05:16.20] SR MARY SEVILLA: You know, I thought about that question a lot, and I didn't think of it at all in the lower grades like many of my friends did. But when I was in the sixth grade we were still living in Los Angeles, and it was some family gathering with six of us cousins were around kind of a semi-circle place we were eating, and someone said, "Oh, cousins from Mexico are here." And I thought, "Hm, who are they?" So these two boys came in--they were around our age--and one of the boys said to me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I said, "I want to be a Sister." And he said, "You are a seester." [laughs]. So I said, "One that goes around like this" [folds hands as in prayer]. Now where that came from I have no idea. Then I remembered the story, I didn't think about it really--and then in high school--it was after my junior year--I was in my junior year--and we played ball after school. So then Sister Augustin [??] was walking across to go over to the convent--so I was walking over with her. And I said, "Next year's going to be great because my--I'll be a senior and my sister will be a freshman." And she said, "Well, I thought you would enter the convent." And I said, "Well, if I did I'd wait until after I graduated," which I thought was a great answer for a sixteen year old. And then she went on to say, "Well, you have all the earmarks," and that kind of thing, and she said, "You aren't interested then?" And I said, "I'm not uninterested." And the very next day I was sitting in this advanced algebra class and she knocks on the door--"May I see Mary Sevilla?". And I--[laughs]--so she traipsed me down to what they called "the bishop's parlor", and it was a room with blue velvet drapes and blue velvet chairs with things here, kind of gloomy dark. And they said, "The provincial is going to come see you." And I said, "What's the provincial?" And she said, "She's the head superior." "Oh, okay." So Sister Rosemary [??] came in--little bitty lady--and she was only there about five minutes. And she just said, "Well, you know, just pay attention to your heart strings. If you feel God calling you let one of the Sisters know and she'll help you enter." So that's what I did. And my very last decision was, "It can't be that bad because the Sisters are always so happy." [laughs].

[00:07:21.16] INTERVIEWER: How did your family feel about you entering?

[00:07:24.24] SR MARY SEVILLA: Oh, my Mom was thrilled. She gave me a big hug, and all that. And then the next morning she gave me money to buy whatever the first thing I would need to take with me--she hoped I'd buy a rosary, which I did to please her. [laughs]. And then she said, "Now, do you want to tell Daddy, or do you want me to?" And I said, "Oh you can tell him." Well, that didn't happen. And so one day I was helping my sister Maggie, showing her how to do something on the sewing machine. And Dad's reading the paper [gestures holding up newspaper], and he says, "You'd make a great teacher." And I said--and Mom said, "Oh she is going to be--she's going to be a Sister." "Oh." Back to the paper. [laughs]. But I think he was pleased, but I think he was afraid to lose his little girl, of course. And when he drove me to take the big trunk we had to take with our stuff in it, he said, "Now honey, if it doesn't work for you, you just call me. I'll come right up and get you." "Okay, Dad." [laughs]. And that was it, so--. But on the day I entered he said he had to work, which he could always get off because he was a free-lance painter--house painter. But I think he couldn't take it, and so Mom called the lady I used to babysit for and she took us. So--and that was an unusual day, because my friend Pat McCarthy from high school was there at the same time, and her Mom and my Mom started talking. So we jumped into Pat's convertible, and went over Teddy's Drive-in, where we were forbidden to go as students--[laughs]--and we had what we thought was going to be our last hot fudge sundae. [laughs]. But it obviously was not.

[00:08:51.13] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what some of your hopes were? What you hoped to achieve or become as a Sister?

[00:08:58.29] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well, you know I don't think I thought about it too deeply. I thought--I knew they taught school, I knew they did nursing, and we had some orphanages. And I said, "Well, I know I don't want to be a nurse. I don't think I want to be a teacher either, but I could take care of kids," because I babysat a lot. That was about as far as it went. I just wanted to be a Sister--I don't think I went into detail about prayer life or any of those things. [laughs].

[00:09:19.19] INTERVIEWER: Did your family come and visit you frequently?

[00:09:21.24] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well, I turned eighteen the first week I was there, and we were allowed to have a half hour visit. So Mom came on the bus with my three younger siblings--and had these two double-

sized cakes that they had made--two sets of them--that came on the bus that way. And we got to have our half hour visit, and I got to take the cakes out to--the rest of the postulants were out there waiting-- [laughs]--and that was very nice. And then Dad came a few times if something needed to be done. I knew my Dad could do it--we needed more Christmas lights, so Dad came, and whoever answered the door called me to come into the parlor. And of course, the novice director said later, "You know, you have to wait for them to be called by your superiors--you don't just go to the parlor." "Oh, okay--I learned something today." [laughs]. But I saw him a lot. And then Mom would get a phone call from a friend saying that they saw me walk by out in the school yard, because the high school is right on the same property. So she'd be so tickled to get word that I was still around--[laughs]--still okay.

[00:10:22.11] INTERVIEWER: How much--what was the adjustment like to early community life and being a postulant?

[00:10:28.06] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well, it wasn't that hard because you know at home we were obedient--you just did what your parents said to do. And even though I was quite independent and knew what the end point was--that I could use my free will. And so--it's like joining a ball club. You take on their charism and their outfit and all the rest of it is the way I looked at it. But you know, it was kind of hard to get used to the clothes, but outside of that it was all right.

[00:10:56.11] INTERVIEWER: What was it like to receive the habit--what do you remember about that?

[00:10:59.28] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well I remember the Sister that taught me in the sixth grade--and then she moved from Los Angeles when we did, and she taught my younger siblings and my cousins--but she was one of the two Sisters that dressed me, because you couldn't put on that apparatus on your head [gestures around face]--you didn't know how to do it. So that was very pleasant. And in those days we wore the white dress. And my aunt--my mother's only sister--had made it, and a few years later my sister got married in it, and then some other time some other postulants wore it when they received the habit. [laughs]. So it got good use.

[00:11:31.18] INTERVIEWER: Okay. What was your first--what were your earliest assignments in ministry?

[00:11:38.16] SR MARY SEVILLA: My very first one was St. Cyril's in Encino [California], and I thought, "Is that in Mexico?"---[laughs]--a lot of people would say that. And I had twenty-five fifth graders and twenty-five sixth graders, and I had to teach them each separately, because the next year they'd be in the "straight grade". And so all day long I was going back and forth, back and forth. So I'd be writing on the board the assignment for these people I was leaving--do this--"You people over here, get your math books out, your red pen, your homework..." And that kind of thing--I went back and forth all day, all day. So I had them for two years, then I had seventh and eighth together for the next two years, and then I finally had a straight eighth grade. And I got kind of bored in the afternoons, really--[laughs]--it was too easy. So that was five years. But I had the boy's yard for five years. And it wasn't a huge yard, but I got them to make up these teams to play soccer ball. Oh, and they loved it--because you had some fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade--oh we have to have some of each grade in these. So they tried to be fair about it. They kicked the ball for all those five years I was out there with them. [laughs].

[00:12:44.10] INTERVIEWER: I'm going to go back just a second, about--so you--when you went to the Mount, you had already entered the community.

[00:12:50.06] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes.

[00:12:52.11] INTERVIEWER: And did you study--what did you study at the Mount?

[00:12:54.28] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well, when we were in the novitiate Sisters came to us and I didn't catch on at first that they were even college classes, you know. [laughs]. And one taught us History of the Congregation, Sister St. Francis [Sheerin]--she was a marvelous story teller. They called it "Western Civ" we found out later. And then, when--after the novitiate we were sent out to teach. So all week long I was trying to stay a page ahead of the kids so I could teach them the next day. And then Friday night you're too tired to study. Saturday we went to Saturday classes. So it went Saturday classes and summer school. And it took

me ten years to get my BA. And it was fun in the summer, because all the Sisters were there--all our friends were there. So, you know, we had a good time--swimming pool's well occupied in between and that kind of thing. So it was good. Ended up being a History major, I think just because in the early days the Sister in charge of our studies always told us what we should take. And sometimes they would think we were just fillers--[laughs]. But anyway I had more History than anything, so I had History and I have an Education minor and I forget what all else--something else, I don't remember. You want the rest of my education? [laughs]

[00:14:06.10] INTERVIEWER: Not yet. Yes, we will, but not yet--History and English is what this says, that you were--

[00:14:11.25] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes, that's right--English.

[00:14:13.01] INTERVIEWER: Well you said you had lots of great memories from those summers. And would you mention any stories or any Sisters from that time that maybe are no longer living?

[00:14:22.16] SR MARY SEVILLA: Oh there are a lot of them [like] that.

[00:14:25.06] INTERVIEWER: Any fond memories?

[00:14:28.16] SR MARY SEVILLA: To say names, right now is a challenge. But some of them that aren't able right now, like Sister Catherine Marie [Kreta, '61] was one that was there--Kreta--and you could always go to her room, because she always had food--all kinds of bags of food in her cupboard that we were welcome to have at any time. I remember different ones I studied with. Some have left the community and went out and became school principals. I mostly remember the time in the swimming pool and by then I was a handwriting analyst--or something of that sort--so I would analyze handwriting on one side of the pool and another Sister read palms and she would do that on the other end of the pool. And some people years later would say, "Remember what you said about my writing?" "No." I do too many of them. [laughs]. So--I can't remember a lot of specific names, but I--practically our whole reception was there except ones that were sent to study, like Sister Marie Chapla [-2016, MSMU home economics faculty] that died last night. She was sent to study diet--to be a dietician. So we didn't see her. But the rest of us it was every summer. And sometimes we lived on campus, and sometimes we lived in the local houses, wherever there was room.

[00:15:37.02] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any of the Sisters who were your faculty?

[00:15:41.21] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes. I remember Sisters and lay people too, because my favorite class was Russian History, and that was Dr. Ronald Oard--or something like that--and the other one was South American History, and that was Dr. [??] Castello--who was only there that semester. But the Sisters I had, yes. I had Sister [Arnelia?] Mary [??], who is not with us anymore. I had--well Sister St. Francis [Sheerin] was in charge of our studies so we saw her frequently. I'm going to mention a lot of names that aren't here anymore. I can't think. I had--not Sister Rita [Angeman??]--you know that was like sixty years ago. [laughs]. Maybe fifty years ago, but a long time anyway. They were there--they taught us. We had lay teachers too, and all that. But most of the ones I'm thinking of were elderly, or they seemed elderly [compared to us] that were twenty-one or twenty-two. So they're not here anymore. They have deceased.

[00:16:51.15] INTERVIEWER: So you graduated in 1963, and you were still teaching at that time?

[00:16:59.29] SR MARY SEVILLA: Um-hm.

[00:17:00.23] INTERVIEWER: So I want to talk a little bit about Vatican II, and then we'll talk about the rest of your education and career after that, if that's okay.

[00:17:07.28] SR MARY SEVILLA: Okay.

[00:17:08.20] INTERVIEWER: Just looking at the--again--the chronology. So when you were teaching is when the Second Vatican Council probably began. Can you think back to what you started to hear about the Council, and how you learned about it, and how that started to impact your community, your own sense of

being a Sister?

[00:17:30.26] SR MARY SEVILLA: Right. Well communication wasn't like it is now. There were no emails or anything like that--[to stay] up to date--but we did get some mailings that came out, and apparently our superiors knew more about it than we did. I remember one of the early things we saw in the newspaper--a picture of a Sister--instead of a habit--she wasn't our community--it was like a vest and this dress--we thought that was pretty cool. [laughs]. That was the first thing I remember. And the other thing I remember is Adrian Van Kaam [(1920-2007), Dutch psychologist] who was a psychologist, and the books he read--wrote, I should say--he and a woman author did another one with him, and I was very fascinated by that psychology. I remember that.

[00:18:14.25] INTERVIEWER: So, it sounds like you were okay with not wearing the habit?

[00:18:19.19] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yeah, that was pretty easy. It came sort of in stages. You know first they said remove the long rosary, which was great because we were always getting caught in the school benches or things like that. And then the next thing was instead of the kind of cord and tassels we wore then we had some other kind of belt--it was flat and I don't know what you'd call it. And then they had some Sisters who volunteered to try modern habits. And they had to get pictures of them--front, back, side all that kind of thing--and send them to the general chapter, which was in St. Louis [Missouri]. And we heard those Sisters laughed through the whole show--and some of them looked like they'd just stepped off the buckboard or something. [laughs]. But anyway when it came to our house, I was up in Northern California at the time, and our superior and principal was Sister St. Michael [Flaherty?, (-2012)]. And she and her sister June went over to San Francisco and did some shopping and came home with something we could possibly wear. And it was a--like a marine-colored jumper--wool jumper--very nice looking, very attractive--and then these white long sleeved blouses. And she said, "Now, you don't have to have these," she said, "but it would be easier to go try on other clothes if you're not wearing a full habit." And you know, they got the sizes perfectly, because one Sister was tiny and skinny, one was quite large, and I guess I was the one in between or something, and that's the way it went. And she always wanted us to have good shoes, you know, and that kind of thing, so she'd send us off to get those things, and it was easier to wear a bit modern clothes. And at some point the provincial told her that we shouldn't be wearing just white blouses, it should be the same material [gestures at arm] as the jumpers. "Couldn't you add sleeves to that?" And St. Michael said, "No, Mother, we couldn't." [laughs]. So we kept wearing those. And then her cousin Margaret Wheeler was on the faculty, but she also was a seamstress. So she came and she would take our "woolies" we called them, that we used to wear to keep warm, and she would cut them out and make the skirt and top out of them--she just skimped with that material and made them. And I was able to sew because I took sewing in high school--I belonged to The Stitchettes [laughs]. So we--some of us made our own, and some Margaret helped with, or other people did. So we gradually had more outfits to wear than just the one jumper.

[00:20:53.23] INTERVIEWER: How did community life change during and after Vatican Council?

[00:20:58.10] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well it changed lot. We had kept silence all the time, unless you had to ask for something. And at the dinner table sometimes we had what they called "recreation" so we could talk. That was usually at the discretion of the superior. And then I think we were in summer school, or we were at St. Mary's Academy for something--probably our final vows--and they changed the rule that we could talk during afternoon collation--you know, the refreshments--we could talk during that time. So we spent an hour in there talking and eating. [laughs]. That changed because otherwise you were there eating in silence and then going about your business. So those were very practical things for us. And I can't remember what came first--the Sisters in France had asked Father Napier I believe his name was to give them a retreat. And he said, "I will only do it if I have the original documents of your community." Well they had to scatter--where are those "holy rules" as they were called that were old. So they scared them up I guess and found them for him, and that started our province--the congregation--thinking about it. So we sent a committee of Sisters over to translate. And so one of the things that they found out about the habit is that in the days we were founded, in 1650, the Sisters could only--not Sisters--women could only be on the street if they were with their father, their husband, something of that sort--or they were wearing widow's garb. So we wore the black--that was the widow's garb--and they were called "The Black Daughters" for a while, until they became--they changed that later. So then we found out that was the reason for it, there was no spiritual reason for it or anything else, so I think that's what started that change. And that was all--I think that was

all during Vatican II, I'm not even positive about the timeline there. Seems like it's all mushed together. [laughs].

[00:22:53.21] INTERVIEWER: What else do you recall learning about the early roots of your community, and how did that change your view of your religious life?

[00:23:02.24] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well it gave us many courageous women to think about and ponder, and say you know, if they could do it we could do it. And those--there were only six in the first founding, and only one could write her name. So people say, "Why did you have Father Pierre Médaille [Jean Pierre Médaille (1610-1669)] be your founder? Shouldn't it have been a woman?" Well, probably they couldn't write. And he was apparently a spiritual leader for apparently a number of groups of women as he went around on his horse to see people. But this group just wanted to help people because France was in such terrible straits after wars, and people were starving and sick and all kinds of things. So they just would meet each day in a kitchen and decide how they were going to divide the city--where they would go, and who would take the soup, and who would take something that seemed like bandages, and who would take what--and that's how they started, very simply. And then--we don't know anything about them really except their names--very little do we know--but we have those stories. And they must have been incredible women. And they didn't all live together either, which I just found out recently--they were in different villages actually--I think two were from Le Puy, and the others from other villages. And then after--then the French Revolution came along, and we know that five of our Sisters were guillotined--we have records of that--possibly more, and the rest scattered back to their families or wherever. And then sometime after Robespierre [Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre (1758-1794), French revolutionary leader] fell, and the war was over--or the Revolution was over, then some bishop--Monsignor somebody contacted Sister St. John [Mother St. John Fontbonne 91759-1843)] and said you must get the ladies together because people are starving and they're sick and they're tattered--everything you can think of that's negative--and so she got another six or eight together and started up in Lyon, France. I think she thought that was a little more central or something. But she was a wise woman, and we quote her more than anybody because we know more about her--more things were written at that time. So we talk more about her actually than we do about the first six.

[00:25:08.28] INTERVIEWER: Is there a part of the charism as it's articulated now that speaks to you the most personally?

[00:25:15.22] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well I like the inclusivity, and loving people without distinction. And I like some of the lines from the first constitution, that said that the Sisters were to do "all of the corporal and spiritual works or mercy of which a woman is capable". And I love to hear our high school students saying that--"We're doing all that a woman is capable"--and our college students the same thing--university. So those are some of my favorite lines.

[00:25:41.04] INTERVIEWER: So let's talk a little bit about your career change. When did you know you wanted to become a counselor or psychologist? How did that happen?

[00:25:51.16] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well, I had taught mainly junior high--fifth on up for sure--for fifteen years, and then I was principal of three different schools over the years. And in the Catholic schools we couldn't afford a counselor, so if somebody was misbehaving I went to the reasons why and how they could have done--do it better, and asked them what they could do better the next time, and that kind of thing, rather than any kind of punishment being meted out. And if boys were fighting in the yard they'd drag them in and put them on the couch outside of my office--and I'd just go, "Well, I don't have time right now. Each of you sit on one end." And so, by the time I would see them--it was a ploy really--they were laughing and talking together. So I said, "I don't want to know who started it." Because you never get an answer. But, "I want to know what you could have done better." So I think I was doing counseling for a number of years. And then when I finally got to the point where I think, "I can't write one more bulletin encouraging parents to come for open house--bring newspapers for the bin"--and there was no creativity to it anymore--so I was going to take a sabbatical. And I started taking some time off, but then my father got ill and he died rather quickly, so I didn't go off to another state which I was going to do for the sabbatical. But I talked to Sister Catherine Marie [??] who was provincial at the time, and she said, "Well I think you'd make a great counselor. Why don't you talk to so and so, who has been through counseling"--and she went to CSUN

[California State University Northridge]. So I did that, and then I don't know how I got it, but I saw an ad for a one day seminar in counseling. So I went to it, and these people were all in the program--they were all so nice and so happy with what they were doing--and, "Why don't you take this?"--so I thought, "Yeah, why don't I?" And so I applied for a masters degree--I already had a masters from San Jose State for my supervision and administration as a principal, so this was another masters. And they were suggesting--well I did sign up for it, and I signed up for classes and everything. And, "Oh, I'm supposed to ask the travel board this"--[laughs]--so I had to write up a whole thing for the travel board. You were supposed to do three different colleges or universities, but I did one and I said, "If this isn't satisfactory I'll look for others." I didn't want to take time to do it. So they passed it, which is a good thing. [laughs]. And then so in order to do that you have to have an MA and you have to spend three thousand supervised hours, and you have to have supervision from a person who is already licensed. And so I had a number of different internships over the three years or so. And I worked at one of the Catholic schools seeing children for a while on one of the days, and for two of those years I was the--what they call the Personnel Director for the province--the ministries part--and so I did that part time, and then I was going to college, and then I was working at that school. And then other times I worked on huge public agencies, which was great, because you had very young to very old--you had people on Medicare, you had all kinds of--it was very enriching. So I got those hours--they were all finished--I got my MA in '88, and then by '91 I was licensed--I passed the orals and I passed the written exam. So--and I started my practice on May 1, 1991.

[00:29:21.25] INTERVIEWER: Before we talk more about that I did want to ask you about that role within the community of counseling other Sisters in terms of their placements--you mentioned that in one of your resumes. And I just thought, after Vatican II and the opening up of ministries to Sisters--different kinds of ministries--you must have had an interesting insight into these journeys of your Sisters.

[00:29:45.11] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes, we had never had to have interviews, we never had to have a resume, because you were just sent some place and the priests were glad to have you, and you started teaching or nursing or whatever you were doing. And so I did attend a seminar with a Sister who was leaving the position as Personnel Director--she went to it too. And I thought, "Oh, this thing this man was teaching us, I could teach that." And so I started helping our Sisters with it and gave seminars to our Sisters. But then other congregations asked me to do that too. So that's how I got to know a lot of Sisters from other congregations, from giving them seminars. And part of it was assessing their personal skills, because they would say, "Well, all I can do is teach." And I'd say, "Yeah, but if you can teach you can motivate, organize..."--this big long list of things you do as a teacher, and gave them papers that listed a whole lot more. And so that worked out well. And I didn't do any personal counseling with our Sisters, and I never have, because it's like doctors don't see their own family--they're not supposed to anyway. [laughs]. So I see Sisters from other communities, and right now I'm on the panel for just one insurance company, and I chose that one because that's one of the choices that people that work for the archdiocese have, so I thought that would be my bid to helping the persons who work for the archdiocese to get through their struggles. But before that, early on, I was on like five panels. But after I served in leadership, I'm only doing one day a week supposedly. [laughs].

[00:31:19.16] INTERVIEWER: Can you say at all then, in more general terms, some of the shifts in ministry that you saw the community go through?

[00:31:30.09] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes. A lot of Sisters wanted to work in parishes then, and they wanted more social services kind of thing--hands on with people. And that was a little bit of a hard time, because when the Sisters started doing those things--first, one of the things in the interviewing, I said, now--most of the Sisters wanted to be on a parish team, so you must ask the pastor what he means with "team". You talk about it, he decides, or he tells you what to do. You know--is that what the team is, or is that what you want? So be sure you're very clear, because that was some of the early problems--they thought they were getting on a team and they weren't. So [laughs]--and interviewing was new to them too, so I talked to them about it as well as giving them handouts and telling them what to do and what not to do and all that. So it seemed to work pretty well. And we had loads of start-up ministries in the seventies--and we had a whole file cabinet full of them when I came back on the leadership team. They were in some closet--this whole cabinet was almost full of those. And so I said to Sister Patricia Rose [Shanahan], the archivist, "Do you know what's here?" So she came and looked and said, "Okay, I'll take a few at a time." And so she got them all out of there eventually. But there were a lot of start-up things that our Sisters did--and sometimes they

turned them over, or the reason for founding was finished, so they closed it down--that kind of thing, went on to something else. So it was an interesting time. And the hard part was that Sisters would be teaching class, and they'd see the parish Sister walking by and getting in a car like she didn't have a thing to do, you know, and there was a little bit of resentment about that--and finally we got over that one--[laughs]--realized that we are all serving in some way or the other.

[00:33:08.12] INTERVIEWER: What about for you? Was there a kind of shift in your identity as you went from education--being a Sister in education to a Sister in therapy and counseling?

[00:33:20.22] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well it was in between years, after I finished a school, because you'd always [unintelligible] I was Sister Mary Sevilla, Principal, whatever the school was. After that, I was still giving talks to parents on discipline, and things of that sort, and giving talks on different things, also on graphoanalysis, because I'm a handwriting analyst. And for the handwriting analysis I could put, you know, "Master Graphoanalyst" or whatever, but for the schools or the parents I didn't have anything to say, so I just put "Consultant" or something like that. So I felt like I didn't know who I was during that time. And then when I got licensed I knew who I was. That was okay. [laughs].

[00:33:58.18] INTERVIEWER: So you said you started your own private practice.

[00:34:02.01] SR MARY SEVILLA: Um-hm. I had done internships, and the last one I did was in Orange County, and by that time I had quite a few of my own clients--they weren't ones that had been referred by the agency. And I got my clients by sending letters out to the pastors, and in there I had a strip that they could just hand to the secretary to put in the bulletin saying what I did. And in the pastor's letter I said what I did and it was with the permission of my religious community, because it was kind of a new thing. And so a lot of them did it, and I'm still getting referrals from that. So I don't know where they keep that information, but they still--people will come and say, "Father so-and-so sent me." And then I did the same with the schools. And I think counseling children is just pretty easy really--you're on the floor playing with them, and you don't sit down and talk as we would--but you just play with them and then the teachers would be thrilled--they didn't know what happened, and the parents were thrilled--"What happened?". Of course sometimes you had to see what was going on at home that was disturbing the child--you know, so I had to take care of that. So I had family therapy a lot of times. And not that that therapist--it's called "Marriage, Family, Child Therapy"--but a lot of them drop the child--they don't like to see children--because you have to have a lot of stuff. And right now I can't see children because I use a room that other people use, so I just see adults now. [laughs].

[00:35:21.01] INTERVIEWER: That's interesting, because when you entered you said you didn't want to be a teacher or a nurse, but you became a teacher, and then eventually you did end up working with children.

[00:35:29.27] SR MARY SEVILLA: Right. And the other thing is when I thought about becoming a handwriting analyst--a professional one--a Sister of Notre Dame was doing it and we went to San Jose State. Then she had put a picture of herself in a student newspaper saying what she did. And so we'd be out having coffee at the Student Union and all these people came up--"Are you the Sister that's handwr--". And I watched her, and these people actually stunned about all the things that she could reveal about them. And so--where was I going with that story--[laughs]--let's see now--anyway I did it. I became certified during my first year of being a principal. And I'd wake up like at four in the morning because I had so much on my mind--but I'd do the handwriting analysis. It totally cleared my mind of school stuff. And it was fascinating because it was about people. And when you analyze someone's writing, they have hundreds of wonderful traits, and they'll say, "Where's the bad ones?" And sometimes I've snuck things in but they didn't quite catch it. And I said, "Well, now, remember I said there's some resentment there, and that means feeling back something happened to you as a youngster--somebody was unfair to you and so you might think that maybe you carry that around. And so you have to think of what's there and then and what's the here and now." So I was sort of counseling doing that before I became a certified counselor. [laughs].

[00:36:52.20] INTERVIEWER: And then you went and you pursued a doctorate.

[00:36:54.29] SR MARY SEVILLA: I did. I thought getting that masters--I was so grateful it finished. And when I got the letter in the mail saying that I was--a licensed therapist, I fell on my knees and prayed and

thanked God. I surprised myself, because I don't usually do those kind of things--that's the only time I remember. But it seemed like it was a long struggle to get through all that. So some of my grad school friends were meeting for lunch one day and I went with them, and they were talking about going to grad school. And they would talk about this one and that one, and they thought the best one was right there in Westwood. And I wasn't even interested, you know--I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention. And so, I went home, and I remember I was vacuuming the floor, and all of a sudden I said out loud, "Why not?" And so I called California Graduate Institute and talked to the man that answered and said I was interested. And he said--I said, "Am I too late for the fall semester?" "Oh not at all, but you have to get down here ASAP--you need two interviews." And so we set up one--we hung up--I thought about it more--I called him back and I said, "I don't want to seem presumptuous, but if I pass the first interview can I have the second one on the same day, because I have a practice going, and I have to see my clients." So he said, "Oh, that's not presumptuous at all." So I did--I had them both the same day and I was in. [laughs]. So thinking I'd never study again and here I was. But the good thing about this it was a PhD in Marriage, Family, Child Therapy. And also you could take some of the classes in union--information if you wanted, or some of the things psychologists take and all that. So it was good. It was great. Made some good friends there too.

[00:38:33.01] INTERVIEWER: Did you specialize in anything, or did you deepen an area of study that was of interest to you?

[00:38:39.22] SR MARY SEVILLA: Not actually. I just wanted to be a generalist, you know. I'd already determined two things I would not do: I wouldn't work with people with drugs, because I didn't have any experience of that, and I would not do eating disorders, because food and festive was so much a part of my family I couldn't imagine people not eating on purpose. [laughs]. So I thought it would not be good to see people for therapy in that.

[00:39:02.20] INTERVIEWER: Did you write a dissertation?

[00:39:04.09] SR MARY SEVILLA: I did.

[00:39:05.23] INTERVIEWER: What was it about?

[00:39:06.22] SR MARY SEVILLA: My dissertation was a comparison of handwriting analysis to the Meyers-Briggs temperament inventory, and how they lined up together. And it came out very high on the belief scale. And I got friends from the "Y" to come and do their handwriting, and then to do the other parts of the testing that was needed. And then we had to sign up for a class at college to learn more about how to do a PhD actually. And so the first week the professor said, "Now how many of you don't have a clue what you want to do to write?" So he put those names on the board. And then he put how many have an idea, maybe have read something or thought about it a lot, and how many of you are far along. So he had these three groups. And he called them something like "red birds", "blue birds", and "mudhens"--the ones that didn't know anything. And so I was in the middle group, but my friends were in the mudhens, so I asked if I could be in that group, so he said, "Fine." And so all we had to do was come to class--actually at first we had to go on maybe one day a week or something. Then after he saw we knew what we were doing we didn't have to come at all. And then we had a second class where we had to--the professor had us bring I think the first chapter--maybe first three chapters or something, and then pass a copy out to friends--but only about eight in the class--you sat around a table--and pass it out to those friends, and they were to read it during the week and then comment. And their comment was, "It sounds just like you're talking to us." They liked it. Nobody had any complaints about it. So I just kept on going. [laughs]. And I finished it--I finished in three and two-thirds years. [laughs].

[00:40:56.01] INTERVIEWER: And then was it after that time that you went into leadership?

[00:41:02.11] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well I had a practice in the city of Cerritos, and I lived at St. Joseph's High School convent for nine of those years. So I was actually there fifteen years when I got called into leadership. And when we started leadership I still had like a semester on my lease at the office, and some clients that needed a little more time. And so I did that one day a week, and Sister Pat Nelson was finishing her MA at Loyola Marymount, so she did that for a day. And people thought we were part time. So I don't know, we were doing weekends and nights and everything else when you're in office. So after I finished that

semester then I totally left that office.

[00:41:40.25] INTERVIEWER: So tell me a little bit about your time in leadership.

[00:41:44.19] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well I enjoyed it. I had the best part, I thought, because I had the ministry. And so that meant I would go to the ministries and help them, or just give them a pat on the back, or see what they were doing. And I had read up about vitamin B complex, and I had used it myself, and found out what a help it is--that people that are low on that can develop a lot of depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms. And the study had been done at--I think it was at UCLA where they gave people food plans--and they were good food plans--except these people didn't have any B foods. I know they are nuts and grains, and I don't know the rest of them. And these people began to develop feeling blue, weepy, couldn't stay on task, not motivated, all those kinds of things. And some developed a pain in their heart--some hearts began fibrillating--so they had to take them off immediately. And they gave them massive doses of B complex. And within hours practically they were back to their old self. So that was convincing reading that, and then when I started taking it once because I went to a doctor who was a nutritionist, and he's examining my [unintelligible]--he says, "You're low on B complex." And I said, "Okay". And he told me what to get and all these different vitamins. And I did, so when I was in office and I was called one time to San Francisco I remember, or the Bay Area, and three different schools that there was a problem either with the pastor or with somebody else--something or other--so I brought some bottles of B complex with me-- [laughs]--and gave them to the person in charge after we talked about their difficulties. And so I still get ribbed about that. But it's a wonderful thing to see that--because clients come in and they don't want to take drugs--they don't want to get hooked on them--and I said, "Well, you can try this." And I tell them the story about it, and I said, "CVS is right down the street, and you might want to try it for a week or so." And I said, "I want to be clear--I'm not a doctor, so I'm not prescribing this. But I can tell you that some people have gotten help with it." And for myself, my help was for years I'd have these sinus infections, when I was principal. They were so bad I was in bed for three or four days. They were really bad. And finally I started taking that. I never had a sinus infection for twenty-five years. And that twenty-five years was when I was in office, and [Sister] Mary McKay said, "You're never sick, what happened?" And I said, "I don't know, but maybe I should be taking more." So I started taking it morning and night. And I heard a nurse practitioner talking to somebody my age who said, "You know we have to take more of certain vitamins when we're older because we don't absorb them as well." So I thought, "Well, that's what I'm doing." So--no more trouble. [laughs]. So it helped my clients, and it helps a lot of Sisters, and I enjoy the part of going out to their places where they work, and they were so appreciative that I'd come, and all those kinds of things. I liked working with the team. Some were better doing write-ups than I was. I like to write, but it wasn't the kind of things I like to write, and sometimes it just sounded stiff to me. The other two would say why don't you do this, this and this. And so we never said who wrote the letters, but we had to have one every month to go into the Designs magazine. [laughs]. And I liked knowing what was going on in the rest of the congregation, and meeting all the Sisters there. That was great fun. I thought that was super. You know it was a lot of late nights and that kind of thing, but seemed like a very worthy thing, and Sisters seemed grateful for the most part that we were doing something helpful. I loved working with Mary McKay you know. She's super. And I lived with her after that. Then we voted her into be the head of the congregation, so now she's in St. Louis, poor thing. But she's been--she was with us last week and she'll still be there tonight again too. [smiles].

[00:45:22.06] INTERVIEWER: You were at the Federation meeting over the summer. Tell me about your involvement with the Federation.

[00:45:28.12] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well the whole time I was in leadership--I was voted in right away to be on the Federation Council it's called. And then the second year they asked me to take over the voting. So you send out emails to all the people in the Federation--ask them all to vote for people they've never seen before or heard. So I got them to start sending their picture at least and saying five or six things about yourself so we can get an idea. So I did that voting for all those years. So I knew pretty much who was going to be joining our team, and that was good. And it was great to see things move forward. And during that time was when we had that investigation by Rome, so that took a lot of time--there was a lot of angst around that and upset and concern--afraid they were going to close down all the congregations in North America or something of that sort--which Rome has the power to do. And we knew that. And they had done it to the Immaculate Heart Sisters. So we were very aware in Los Angeles. So in some of the meetings we

had the Sisters--you know, some give input that would be helpful. And we had women who were canon lawyers--there were Sisters who are canon lawyers--come talk to us about the rules and regulations and things we might want to think about. So we were doing that in our congregation, because we are large, as well as at the Federation. So when the time came to make a decision, we were supposed to fill out all these questionnaires and send them in to Rome. But they were questions that were about congregations that are cloistered. They didn't have a lot to do with our life. And Mary McKay got the idea that we should go bring the Cardinal up to date on this. So he had heard something about it, but she brought a whole packet--"This is the first letter we got, this we got..." He says, "Oh my gosh!" And he says, "Oh! Don't tell them one thing about your finances." [laughs]. So we had already thought that was risky, to let the archdiocese know what we had--because they could take it, actually--just say it was needed for something else. And so--anyway our final decision was not to answer the questionnaire, but send a very respectful letter--send them a copy of our rule which they already had--and said, "We try to live this. We're not perfect but we try to live it." And we just sent it in. And we got more begging notices to please send out questionnaires, but we never did. And so, when we were in the Federation and also in our own congregation, we had a time when we each had to go to the microphone to decide what our group was going to do. And we all one after another said they would not send the letter. They would not send the questionnaire, rather. [laughs]. So it was a very interesting time. It was scary. But we felt that, you know, women in the world are downplayed so often--we don't have any way to unite and to speak--they don't have a forum for doing that. And we're a large, large group--we had a forum and so we wanted to speak to it. And we did. [laughs]. So we were glad the way it turned out.

[00:48:27.05] INTERVIEWER: Can you speak to just the benefit of the relationships you have in the larger congregation but also in the Federation for the whole kind of CSSJ [Congregations of Sisters of Saint Joseph]--how that's shifted over time, you know.

[00:48:43.03] SR MARY SEVILLA: Right, yeah. You know you try to keep everyone knowing what's happening in the Federation, what's happening in the congregation, but a lot of people don't read it because it's not affecting their daily life. But I think once this thing happened with Rome there was a lot more interest. And people always like going to the Federation, because that's a trip away some place, and you're with Sisters. You always feel very at home, no matter what St. Joseph congregation they're in, because we have the same founding, the same spirit and all that--just feel like you've always known them. So that was always fun. And some people got very connected with those people--and you know, I supposed they wrote for years--because they connected in some way or the other. And--you're probably going to cut that out. And I see cookies over there that the chef brought about twenty minutes ago. [laughs]. Is this a good place to stop?

[00:49:30.22] INTERVIEWER: [all laugh]. [Director's comments] [Interview paused]

[00:49:38.18] INTERVIEWER: --so we had someone who was such a good thinker like Mary McKay. It was excellent.

[00:49:41.14] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments]

[00:50:08.10] INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else from that experience of being in leadership during the investigation that you would want to share?

[00:50:13.28] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well the Sisters were pretty scared. So we went around to the whole province, and talked in different areas, and they came and they were all just so grateful, because it put them at ease to know why we were doing it. We're doing, you know, what the rest of the congregation was doing and what the Federation was doing. And the fact that I was in the Federation as well, that helped, to talk about what they were doing. So it worked out. I think that was a good thing that we did. When we were first in office we went around the province too, because some probably didn't know who we were even. So we went and told them something about us--where we were born, and all that. It's the easiest thing we ever did. We didn't have to prepare anything. [laughs].

[00:50:51.29] INTERVIEWER: Was there anything you witnessed in terms of ministries--so you would go and visit all the ministries--that you know--was inspiring or made you particularly proud of the province?

[00:51:06.12] SR MARY SEVILLA: Hm. Well I think the many things that they were doing to help people that really had no help. It was just amazing to me that they did it. And even some of the Sisters that were working on those things--a couple of them had come down with cancer and they were still pretty ill, and they were still plugging along, keeping this thing going. They were an inspiration.

[00:51:28.18] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any specifics--any specific Sisters or ministries?

[00:51:35.11] SR MARY SEVILLA: Jeanette [Sister Jeanette van Vleck (1943-2003)]--she died of her cancer, but she turned it over to the Jesuits before and she knew she was ill. Jeanette Van Vleck was her name. She was about--in my sister's class--about eight years younger than I. She was one of them. And Sister Caroline Chang--who had a couple of things that she was involved in and started. Probably Kathy [??] was with her, I imagine. Oh gosh there were so many. [Sister] Joanna Bramble--I went up to see their--they have a place in Oakland where women could come stay for a while, if they you know lost their house somehow. And when I went in there was a gal sitting on the couch where you go in. And she was doing her knitting and all, and I just said, hello hello, and pretty soon--she's the one that's homeless and that her husband had gotten very ill, and the money all went to his illness, and he died, and she had no house anymore. And so they had taken this large room and made it into--must have been plywood--cubicles--[laughs]--you know, up to the ceiling, so--a place to sleep anyway, and to keep their stuff and all that kind of thing. And so I was just impressed with their ingenuity and how they worked that room, and how they helped these women. And then it also helps them to get to the next step where they could find housing or what do they call it--a section eight--they seemed to have ways to get that--and food coupons, and all the rest of those--food stamps. So they did that for many years, she and--Joanna Bramble and [Sister] Mina Gaskell. So that was one of the ones. I'm trying to think. I actually went to more schools--high schools as well as elementary--than anything else, I guess because I was more familiar with that--thought I could be more of a help. The others it was just kind of an "atta-girl" kind of thing. [laughs]. Love what you're doing, it's wonderful.

[00:53:37.26] INTERVIEWER: How have you seen the mission and charism spread beyond the congregation to your lay partners?

[00:53:43.28] SR MARY SEVILLA: Oh that is very exciting to me. When I was in Le Puy for a retreat two years ago, Sister Kitty Hanley [Sister Katherine "Kitty" Hanley] gave it--and there were three Sisters--no not three Sisters--three lay women that were from St. Joseph's Academy--Mount St. Joseph's in Philadelphia congregation of St. Joseph's. And apparently some time during the previous school year--I think this is how it works--that some personnel from that St. Joseph's came to St. Joseph's in Philadelphia to find out more about the Sisters and how did school and things like that. And I'm not sure if students went with them or not--I'm not clear on that part. So when our three women were there of course they went right away to meet these women from France, and they went to the school, and they met the children--there were five high school students--three girls and two boys I think--were just on fire with wanting to know about the Sisters. They wanted to know their stories--wanted to know more about this charism--the spirit--and how are you doing all of these things that you're helping people. They were just "blah blah blah blah". Of course that had to be translated for them, and they told us about it. So in France--these children started a club--and I can't think of what they call it. And they don't have clubs in their schools in France. And they have to be very careful about religious things in their schools, even though they're Catholic schools, they still have to be careful. France is still not real keen on Catholics I guess. And then the three women went with the other three women a couple of times, and the last time they went the students had prepared a twelve page typed report of what they wanted to accomplish. And I thought, "Wow!" whoever would have thought that Le Puy, France--because the Sisters there are really ancient--I mean they can't even go out of their places--they are elderly and ill and all of that. But apparently they'd heard about them and they wanted to know more. And they set it up so that there was some visiting of another school because of what they were doing. So--finding out more about the Sisters. So I was happy with that. At the same time we heard that--so I told them about our CSJ Institute--I said, "Well, look at what we've got!" You know--you don't want to brag too much to take the shine away from them, but this is really fantastic. And then the other thing we heard at that time was that the last Sister who was teaching at St. Kate's University in St. Paul [Minnesota] had left. So there are no more Sisters--but I don't know if it was the alums or the students rose up and said, "We have to start something!" So the spirit of the Sister continues. And that was all within a few weeks' time that I heard all that. I was very excited about that. And then I know some of our schools--Sister Joyce Hampel

[(1948-2014)]--who has died now--she did a lot of the charism at Our Lady of Peace in San Diego. And the first time I went to a Mass at St. Joseph's High School in Lakewood, and the student body president was up there--she was using all of our phrases--"all of which women are capable of doing"--"serve the dear neighbor"--she was going on. It brought tears to my eyes. That was years ago. Because Sister Pat Nelson and [Sister] Ann Lewis [now Sister Linda Vendetti] had retreats with these kids over the years while they were there, and that's where they picked all that up. So, you know, it is spreading. And the other high schools do the same. We don't have many in elementary school anymore, but so I'm just glad the things I'm hearing it's going. Because people have the charism in them already, but they don't belong to any particular group, so they recognize that that's something they love and are interested in, and they want to find out more about it.

[00:57:21.07] INTERVIEWER: So do you have particular hopes or anxieties for the future of the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:57:27.22] SR MARY SEVILLA: Well, I think we're past the hand-wringing stage when we realized we weren't getting new members, but all across the northern part of the world it's the same thing. And so we just think God has something in mind, and I think what's helped us a lot is when they decided that we should at least spend ten minutes in reflection time every day and just asking God to guide us in some way--let us know--send us some hints--whatever we're supposed to do, do. We've heard the young people that Sister Darlene [Kawulok] works with--they love our Sisters--they love what we do--they love us and all those things. But a lifetime commitment? That's out of bounds--no way they want to make a lifetime commitment. So, you know, maybe we have to change and accept people that want to come and work with us for two years or five years or something, I don't know. But I'm just confident now that--you know, we started with six--I don't think we'll go down that far--but if we do, well, okay, just keep on keeping on--[laughs]--finding new ways to serve and new ways to multiply the people that are here.

[00:58:35.02] INTERVIEWER: Is there something you are most proud of of the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:58:38.29] SR MARY SEVILLA: I think who we are, you could say. But I want to say this--at some meeting we were, we were asked at one part of it--it might have been a congregational--must have been congregational, and so it was all the leaders--and at some point we were supposed to be with our own leaders, our own teams and talk about and think about what's one thing that we know from the history of our province that makes us who we are today. And right away Pat Nelson said, "The Trek." The trek of the seven sisters who walked across the desert from San Diego to Tucson--partly they were in a covered wagon, but it wasn't big enough for everybody, so they had some really very difficult challenges doing that. Of course, we said, they were young, that was one thing. But real hardships. And some things that were funny. And of course the one I like is when the driver of the covered wagon had found some saloon along the way. And there was a room in back, so they said they could sleep there that night. But then the men started coming in, and they were proposing to them. [laughs]. So they thought that was pretty funny. I don't know what they thought. Hoo hoo really. No. You know there weren't many women in Tucson--in all that part of the world there weren't a lot of women, because all the Spaniards that came in ships it was all men. So anyway--I like that--what those women did. It makes us feel that we can do anything, if they went through all that difficulty. And we do the Trek now, but we go in a van and we stay in a motel, and stay in a convent at the other end, and that kind of thing. But it's beautiful just to relive that part--where they were and what it looked like--and pray there--and pray gratitude for them, what they did. [laughs].

[01:00:35.05] INTERVIEWER: What brings you the greatest joy as a Sister today?

[01:00:38.17] SR MARY SEVILLA: I think it's a place where you can use your best talents, and what you feel that you are good at, or that you could be good at. Like I said I didn't want to be a teacher, but I sure got thrown into it having two grades at the same time. That and also the freedom to pursue our other interests you know. Like I'm the family genealogist--and now they're all calling me the great-grandmother or whatever I am of the family--and we have a huge family. And I wrote a family book--had time to do that. It was when I finished my PhD, because I didn't have to do that anymore, then I used Friday, Saturday and Sunday, when I wasn't seeing clients, to do a family book. And I brought that with me, but it's downstairs. Anyway I think it's the best way to use the talent. It's still develop your spiritual life, to whatever extent you want or can. And when we were young, the good part was you were sent to a convent where there were a lot of

Sisters older than you--and like we didn't even know how to make a bulletin board, you know. And they had sets of letters you could trace and all that sort of thing or give us ideas and that--so that made us easier to get into doing what we had to do. And we were given a--well I was given anyway--I don't know what you call it--a model teacher--who was supposed to help me with it--but she always said I didn't need any help. [laughs]. But anyway--we were given help by the Sisters we lived with, so that was good. It all helped. And all through the years if there are people who are interested in the same thing as you are, say, "What do you think if we start thus and so?" "Okay, how could we do that? Let's think about it." You know, so you are free to do it--it's great. As long as you are serving the dear neighbor--there's so many ways to do that.

[01:02:23.00] INTERVIEWER: I want to ask you about a couple other things. That was a lovely sharing there. When I saw you at a lunch at the Mount, earlier this year, where you told a brief story about Mother Brady. You were a young Sister, right?

[01:02:40.20] SR MARY SEVILLA: Right.

[01:02:43.11] INTERVIEWER: Would you tell that story on camera for us?

[01:02:44.00] SR MARY SEVILLA: Sure. Okay. Mother Margaret [Mary] Brady [(1866-1954)] was the provincial of our congregation way back--ninety-five years ago maybe. And she was the founder of the college. And we didn't know anything about it at that point. But we knew we stayed in Brady Hall, when we stayed there for the summer. Later Carondelet Hall was built. And so we knew it must have been somebody important, but we didn't know too much. But as novices, two of us were given the job to go every day after we had our period of recreation--basketball playing, eating, whatever we were doing--and we were sent to the infirmary, where there were only two Sisters--and Mother Margaret Brady was one of them. And she was senile at the time, and she'd say things [unintelligible]--"I planted every one of those trees myself." You know, and she probably did, you know. [laughs]. And then she'd talk about, "Oh the worst was when our carriage got stuck in the mud." There were no roads up there--they just drove up through the weeds and all that kind of thing. And so, it was--it's so humbling for this older woman to share those memories, and I don't know if she was even talking to us--she was just kind of talking--but to remember those all these years and what she had to go through. Because when she bought that property you know, the real estate man brought his dog. And they said, "Oh how nice!" And he said, "We have to. He's going to let us know about the rattlesnakes." "Oh, rattlesnakes, okay." And then when they finally got settled up there, and then they called to ask the archdiocese for a priest to come say mass, "Oh we can't send our priest up there--the rattlesnakes and endanger their lives--we can't do that!" So they called the Jesuits, and they've been coming ever since. [laughs]. I don't know if you wanted to hear that part of the story. [all laugh].

[01:04:35.19] INTERVIEWER: The other thing I wanted to ask you about that's not in the questionnaire is, you travelled quite a bit.

[01:04:41.07] SR MARY SEVILLA: I have.

[01:04:41.26] INTERVIEWER: Is there anything about your world travels that you would like to share, or how it's shaped and formed you?

[01:04:46.17] SR MARY SEVILLA: People ask me where I began to love travel. And I had to think about that. But you know, Dad had the car--Mom didn't drive anyway, and he was at work. So we went on streetcars every place and busses, or we'd walk down Main Street. Mom would have somebody on the buggy at the time and the others on the side of us, and if we behaved ourselves we got an ice cream at one place before we came home. And so, any place we went it was kind of exciting to see the people, and we went downtown L.A.--we'd see old people going into the trash and things like that. I thought, "That's really sad. That's awful." And so I think that's where it started, probably. And then most of my travelling was done when I became a graphoanalyst, because I was hired by the chapters of other cities in the United States--I went to a lot of those. And then I went to Canada--was brought up there to do a seminar for them--by that time I guess I was considered an expert or at least knew something more than they knew. And then, to London, England, and Hawaii, of course, which is our province. So the handwriting analysis got me around the world to begin with. And then I got the idea to write to the cruise lines to see if they could use a handwriting analyst--a graphoanalyst--on the cruise ships. And I said how valuable it would be for their passengers--they

would love it, because they would learn more about themselves and blah blah blah. And so computers were just coming in, so I could write a letter on a computer and have lots of copies of the same thing. And I also had a phone, because I was doing an internship and I didn't have a phone, and I had to have a private phone because of the work I was doing, and so the director of the agency bought a phone for me to use. I had to turn it in when I left. So I got to get my calls privately on there. So--okay, where was I going with that now--

[01:06:45.26] INTERVIEWER: The cruise lines.

[01:06:47.13] SR MARY SEVILLA: Oh the cruise lines. So I didn't hear--I think I sent out about ten or twelve letters or something, and some I didn't hear from at all. Some said they'd file it--well you know that's the circular file. But the one that was good was a man who provided speakers and people that taught card playing, and all those things on ships. It's a separate agency, so the cruise line doesn't do it themselves, it's a separate agency. So he called while I was off on a trip someplace with a friend. We were camping out. And I called home just to tell my mother I was still alive. And she said, "This man is calling you and he wants you to go on a ship across the Atlantic Ocean." I said, "Really? Get me his number, Mom." So I tried, you know, I couldn't remember so I had to call her back and ask her for it. So I called him and he said this is what we'd like you to do. And I said, "Oh, okay." And we were delivering cars on the East Coast I think, and we were on the way to the Midwest to go to a graphoanalysis congress, and I started thinking, "Where am I going to get clothes for a cruise ship?" And I thought of my high school friend, Edwina. And I thought there's no point in calling her, she lives in Texas. I have to go back to California and I'm going to be here six days. She'll never get me because I'll be at meetings and all that kind of thing. And so the Sister that was with me, Gloria [Prough?]-she has three--four other sisters, so she knew she could just wear their clothes. My sisters and I never traded clothes for some reason. My sister Maggie is smaller than I am and Juanita is about the same size but she's eight years younger so we just didn't wear each other's clothes. So when I got back I called Edwina, and she said, "I'm at my Mother's house in Westchester." So that was great--we lived in Manhattan Beach. So--my parents' house, that's where I went. So she came the next day, bringing her little child and she said, "You know, I know just the person--my friend Mary Lou Ward. She's the same size as you. Let's call her up." She calls Mary Lou--we go back to Westchester, and I'm trying on all of Mary Lou's clothes. I took a big suitcase--more than I'd ever take now, sizewise--of all these clothes, including her shoes--and I had lovely clothes for this trip. So but that was the first of the cruises. Then I think I was finishing my time at whatever school I was principal of, and it was the time in between where you teach school, so I was in Oxnard teaching, and it was just about dismissal time, and the secretary called on the phone in my room to say, "You have a phone call from New York." And I said, "I do?" I said, "Well, I have to dismiss the children." And she said, "I'll come do that." So I went down and it was the same guy, saying that he had a cruise that he wanted me to take from Hawaii to Japan, and all this. And I said, "Oh, now those dates." It was my Silver Jubilee year--I was celebrating with Sister Anita Joseph--not Anita Joseph--one of the Fitzpatricks--she was celebrating her fiftieth, and so I couldn't do that--and I was teaching, you know, I couldn't leave. So he said, can you get somebody. I said, "Oh, sure I can get somebody." So I thought, "Well I don't even know the people up here in Northern California," because I'd just, you know--wherever I was I didn't know the people--well I knew the people in Northern California--I didn't know the people in Southern. So I thought, "Well, why does it matter." So I called one of the guys in Northern California--Berkeley--and his wife answered, and Joanie said, "Oh, he's not here, I'll have him call you." And I said, "Just tell him this: they need somebody to cruise doing graphoanalysis"--I told her what it was--"and call this man if he's interested." "Oh, I'll have him call you right away." I said, "No, no, just have him call." So he did get it--he did get to do that. And so then the man that got--the agent that did these cruises sometime later said, "I have a plum of a cruise for you because I want to thank you." So it was first going trans-Atlantic, and then it was going up into the Scandinavian countries. And that was so wonderful--it was great. So I had a lot of--I did sixteen cruises over a period of time--they were always free for myself and a friend. So I did the Mexican Riviera, the Caribbean, the capitals of Europe, the--you name it--all kinds anyway. [laughs]. So--Panama Canal--all those things. So that travel was great, because that was free. And then when I was going to one of the graphoanalysis--they had it every summer--and that included that one time when we were delivering cars and driving to get there--and this Notre Dame Sister who got me into it was going to get her masters certificate, and I was going to get my--I guess--the general certificate. And so we both were going to go. And so we went. But before we went, when her relatives heard we were coming, they had us come to all their places. Somebody was in Portland, Maine--somebody was in Maryland--somebody was in--I don't know, we were visiting all those people. And when I told my regional superior I was going she said, "Oh, you must

go to the generalate and see that." Well, that's all I needed. So we figured out from Chicago how to get to St. Louis, and how to manage that part--we did all those things. We just kept doing it. We said, "Why not? Let's find a way." So if anybody says, "You must come see us sometime" wherever they live, I say "Don't be surprised if I show up!" [laughs]. I consider that an invitation. So it was through lecturing and through the graphoanalysis that really got me going. And then when I was writing the family book I think I went to Mexico City about five times. And then other cousins--the one that was in Puerto Vallarta heard I was coming--"You must come and stay with us a few days". I thought, "Okay. Why not?" [laughs]. So I was doing research in Mexico City. And luckily those cousins speak some English--quite a bit of English actually. And then my mother's parents were born in Croatia. And so she was quite elderly, and we thought quite out of it pretty much, but when I was going, I said, "I'm going to Croatia, Mom." And she said, "Oh that's a long ways away." She knew that. And so I went, and I--at that time it was '96 right after that peace accord and all. And the AAA had nothing on Croatia--libraries had nothing on Croatia--nobody had anything on Croatia. But I found one of those chat lines that were people--and I could tell by their writing that they were foreign-speaking by the way they wrote English--and so one of the questions I asked, "Is it safe for a middle-aged woman to go and drive by herself?" And they said, "Oh, absolutely. We wish we could go with you." And one man had been in the army I guess--the United States Army--and his job during those ethnic wars was to be in touch with all the police departments, and so he gave me the name of a head of the police department in two cities where I was going to be, in case I ran into trouble. I never had to use it, but that was nice. So that time I met cousins for the first time, and I only had a few lines of Croatian that a cousin--distant cousin that I found living in Watsonville--had written out. I wanted to say, "My grandfather was blah blah. My grandmother was blah blah. [Ya sam] I am Mary Sevilla." And then I had a line that said, "I will come to your house"--and I'd look in the guide book--Saturday at five or whatever I said. And they'd go, "Blah blah blah"--I hadn't a clue what they were saying. And then I would repeat it again. And then I'd say, "Bye bye." And then I would get there, and people in the hotels--I always stayed in hotels because I didn't even know these people--they always spoke both languages. So I'd say, "Would you call my cousin for me?" So they'd either come on a bus to meet me and then I would drive to their house, or we had different ways that we met. And so I met lots of them. And most of them were on this one island, so hundreds I met that time--absolutely hundreds. [laughs]. So I've been going back ever since, because different cousins from here want to go to Croatia, and they want me to be there to take them to meet the relatives. So I've done that about four times for them--so I guess I've been there maybe six times or so. So, all part of traveling. [laughs].

[01:14:52.17] INTERVIEWER: Sister Mary, is there anything else that you reflected on or wanted to share that I haven't asked you about?

[01:14:58.27] SR MARY SEVILLA: I can't think of it. But I'm very proud to be part of a group is so involved in helping other people and willing to help us, you know, me if I need it, or anybody else, and always finding ways to make things happen. It's been--it is a great life for me. I can't imagine any other way at this point. So I'm happy to be here. [laughs].

[01:15:25.02] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments]

[01:16:06.27] KELBY THWAITS: So you have spent a lot of your life in church ministry, but also you've spent a lot of your life in medicine and science, essentially, with social sciences or psychology. How do you see connections between those two fields, or disparity between the two? And what's your impression or interpretation of those types of things? How do you reconcile them yourself?

[01:16:33.20] SR MARY SEVILLA: I guess I think it's--I never thought of it as being "church work"--but we exist because we belong to the Catholic church, you know we're approved by the Catholic church--and teaching the schools and that. But as far as our pay--our stipend--it was the same stipend whether you were a principal or the librarian or part-time helpers would have gotten the same stipend, so it didn't really matter. And you went where you were sent, and it's the same thing--we were helping people to live better lives. And then as a psychotherapist, boy, you went there because people were telling you--I mean you feel so honored that they would share this grief with you or whatever it is that's happening. And so you're helping those people to lead a better life. So to me it all goes together. You know, you're just using the skills that you have to make things better for people.

[01:17:22.26] [Director's comments]

[01:17:26.18] SR MARY SEVILLA: I guess I don't think of it as church ministry because like--you know--if we were down and out, they don't help us, you know--our money has to come from what we do. Although I did hear once, this Monsignor who was very stingy about giving Sisters a raise or anything--one Sister from a small congregation--it was the early days when people had cancer--somebody in her congregation had cancer, and they didn't have enough insurance or didn't have any probably. And she went to that Monsignor and he took care of her whole cancer thing. So, that's something. [laughs]. But for the most part we didn't even get a raise from the stipend. And they kept saying it was because of the Sylmar earthquake. Now what that had to do with it we never could figure out. But that's what they told us. And for years we were trying to get that raise. I was on the principal's advisory committee for the archdiocese, and we kept pushing for that. "Now Sisters, you know, the Sylmar earthquake..." "No. What is it about the Sylmar earthquake?" No, we didn't say that. But--[laughs]--you know.

[01:18:28.04] INTERVIEWER: It's remarkable, you know, the shift that you've seen in authority in the church. You know, to go from the--to the LCWR [Leadership Council of Women Religious]--you know--first time.

[01:18:39.14] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes, right. All of that. That's right. Because besides being a Federation the LCWR was handling that too.

[01:18:45.06] INTERVIEWER: Right. Which CSJ's and SSJ's have had a lot of leadership.

[01:18:50.01] SR MARY SEVILLA: Yes. For sure. Well, you know, one of ours started each of those.

[01:18:53.15] [Director's comments] [Sister Mary Sevilla shares her genealogy book off camera.]

[01:21:56.12] End of interview.

Interview Index

Interview Date: October 6, 2016

Interviewee: Sister Mary Sevilla

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaites, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

Location: [Carondelet Center]

Transcription Date: 11/17/2016

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:01:24.05] Introduction. Name and age: Mary Rita Sevilla, 81 years old.

[00:01:43.19] Early life and family. Born Los Angeles, California; lived Manhattan Beach, California. American Martyrs school. High school at St. Mary's Academy. Taught by CSJs.

[00:03:43.01] Siblings. Five--older brother Tony, Sr. Mary, younger sister Maggie, brother Joe, sister Juanita. Playing basketball.

[00:04:16.00] Early religious experience. Mother saying rosary. Father born Mexico City, Mexico.

[00:05:13.09] Deciding on vocation. Telling cousins about being a Sister. Junior year high school, Sister asking about vocation.

[00:07:22.11] Family reaction to vocation. Having "last hot fudge sundae".

[00:08:52.03] Hopes for vocation. Wanted to care for children. Family visits. Father helping Sisters with handiwork.

[00:10:23.17] Early community life. "Like joining a ball club". Getting used to habit. Receiving habit. Handing down white postulant dress.

[00:11:32.03] Early missions. St. Cyril's, Encino, California, teaching fifth and sixth grade for two years; teaching seventh and eighth grade for two years; teaching only eighth grade five years. Supervising boys yard--playing "soccer ball".f

[00:12:44.25] Studying at the Mount. Novitiate classes--history of congregation. Ten years to get BA via Saturday classes and summer school, while teaching. History major, education minor. Sisters in charge determine novices' major.

[00:14:14.03] Sisters and memories of the Mount. Sister Catherine Marie [Kreta, '61]--food. Swimming pool. Handwriting analysis. Sister Marie Chapla [-2016, MSMU home economics faculty]. Russian history with Dr. Ronald Oard. South American history with Dr. Castello. Sister [Arnelia?] Mary [??]. Sister St. Francis [Sheerin]. Sister Rita [Angeman??].

[00:16:52.14] Graduated 1963. Vatican II. Newspaper picture of Sister without habit. Book by Adrian Van Kaam [(1920-2007), Dutch psychologist]. Gradual changes to habit--removing rosary, belt. Volunteering to try modern habits. Sister St. Michael [Flaherty?, (-2012)], her sister June bought navy blue jumpers with white blouses. Making modified habits out of other garments.

[00:20:53.13] Changes to community life after Vatican II. Rule of silence changed. Father Napier retreat and original CSJ documents. Original habit of founders in France wearing "widow's garb".

[00:22:55.11] Changes in religious life after learning about founding Sisters. Courage of founders. Founders didn't live together. French Revolution and founders. Sister St. John [Fontbonne] in Lyon.

[00:25:08.17] Current charism. Inclusivity. Loving without distinction. "All the works of mercy of which a woman is capable."

[00:25:42.22] Career change to psychologist. After teaching junior high, principal of three schools. No counselors in Catholic schools. Counseling students. Sister Catherine Marie [??] provincial advocates counselor training. Began 2nd masters degree as licensed counselor 1988. Two years as personnel director for province. Internships with public companies. License in 1991.

[00:29:22.00] Counseling other Sisters in community on placements (personnel director). New ministries after Vatican II. Professional counseling in other communities, public companies.

[00:31:22.11] Changes in ministry after Vatican II. Working in parishes. Social services work. Early problems with "parish teams". Training for interviews. Sister Patricia Rose, CSJ archivist, archiving startup ministry descriptions. Resentment of teaching Sisters towards parish Sisters.

[00:33:09.29] Changes in personal identity because of changes in ministry. Handwriting analysis. Confusion about identity before licensing.

[00:33:58.18] Private practice and internships. Internship Orange County. Getting clients. Counseling children. Family therapy. Changes to adult only counseling. Handwriting analysis certification.

[00:36:53.01] PhD in Marriage, Family, Child Therapy. Dissertation on Comparison of Handwriting Analysis to Meyers-Briggs Temperament Inventory. Attending classes on writing PhD.

[00:40:56.03] Leadership work. Practice in City of Cerritos, California--living at St. Joseph's High School convent. Sister Pat Nelson [assistant provincial superior 2005]. Ministry leadership. Vitamin B complex for depression and sinus infections. Sister Mary McKay [congregational director].

[00:45:22.01] Working on CSJ Federation Council. Investigation by Rome ([Apostolic Visit 2010; also letter 2016]. Discussions with Cardinal. Reasons for refusal to complete questionnaire from Rome.

[00:48:26.02] Benefit of relationships in congregation and federation.

[00:49:35.15] Break in interview.

[00:49:39.10] Interview resumes. Sister Mary McKay. Experience of being in leadership during Rome investigation. Reducing congregational anxieties.

[00:50:54.02] Ministries that were inspiring. Sisters helping others even when ill. Sister Jeanette van Vleck [(1943-2003)]. Sister Caroline Chang. Sister Joanna Bramble and Sister Mina Gaskell, Oakland shelter for homeless women.

[00:53:37.01] Spreading mission and charism to lay partners. In France, lay women from Mt. St. Joseph's Academy, Philadelphia and high school students interested in Sisters and their charism; began club. Interest in CSJ Institute. Retirement of last Sister at St. Kate's University, St. Paul, Minnesota inspires lay to continue spirit of Sisters. Sister Joyce Hampel [(1948-2014)] and charism at Our Lady of Peace, San Diego, California. St. Joseph's High School in Lakewood, California--students inspired by Sister Pat Nelson and Sister Ann Lewis [now Sister Linda Vendetti] retreats with students.

[00:57:21.06] Hopes or anxieties for future of CSJs. Daily reflective time. Sister Darlene Kawulok work with students re: history of CSJs. Temporary vocations.

[00:58:34.00] Things most proud of as CSJ. "Trek of the Seven Sisters" from San Diego, California to Tucson, Arizona [1870]. Story of Sisters spending night in back room of saloon and men proposing to them.

[01:00:36.15] Greatest joy as a Sister today. Using best talents. Freedom to pursue other interests (e.g. family genealogy). "Model teachers" training students to teach.

[01:02:23.09] Story about visiting Reverend Mother [Margaret Mary] Brady [(1866-1954)], provincial and MSMU founder in old age--not sending archdiocese priest due to rattlesnakes--sending Jesuits instead.

[01:04:35.17] World travels. Early love of travel. Traveling as handwriting analyst--Canada, England, Hawaii--on cruise lines. Borrowing friends' clothes for ship. Silver Jubilee year--celebrating with Sister [??] Fitzpatrick. Sixteen cruises total--Scandinavia, Mexican Riviera, Caribbean, capitals of Europe, etc. Visiting Mexico to write family genealogical book. Visiting Croatia to see mother's family home and relatives.

[01:14:52.24] Other topics. Pride in helping others.

[01:15:24.29] [Director's comments].

[01:16:07.23] Comparison of religious life and work as social scientist. Both helping others. Monsignor helping cancer sufferer. Stipend as Sisters.

[01:18:27.19] Shift in authority in church over time. Leadership Council of Women Religious (LCWR). Her book on family genealogy. [Director's comments]. Scanning her book and obtaining digital photographs.

[01:21:32.21] Thanks.

[01:21:56.12] End of interview.